

**CALIFORNIA STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION**

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## **Highlights from the State Board of Education**

*A monthly summary of key action taken by the SBE*

*July 2001*

### **\*\*\*SBE Approves State Charter for Edison Academy\*\*\***

The State Board of Education unanimously approved a request by Edison Charter Academy to renew and convert its charter from San Francisco Unified School District to a state-approved charter school under the oversight of the SBE. The SBE granted the charter for a five-year period, with conditions. Among other provisions, the conditions of approval included the following: submission of written verification of participation in a Special Education Local Plan Area or SELPA; submission of a revised, proposed operational budget for 2001-02, and cash flow and financial projections for the next three years of operation; and submission of a management agreement citing the terms and conditions under which Edison Schools, Inc., will operate the Edison Charter Academy. At the public hearing before the vote, parents from the school spoke in favor of the state charter, citing the improved academic performance of their students. According to Edison Charter Academy's API Growth Report, the school exceeded its 1999-2000 growth target by five-fold – its target was 17 but actual growth was 87 points. That school-wide improvement was driven by improved performance by African American students, who had an API subgroup growth target of 14 points but achieved actual growth of 121 points. For Latino students, the target was 14 points, with actual growth of 77 points. No opposition to the charter petition was raised during the public hearing.

### **\*\*\*SBE Denies All-District Charter for San Lorenzo Valley\*\*\***

The SBE unanimously denied a request by the San Lorenzo Valley Unified School District to become an all-charter district. The motion by Board Member Bob Abernethy to deny the petition stated that the district "does not appear to have the ability to successfully implement and maintain the district's program under the freedom and flexibility provided to an all-charter district by the Charter Schools Act." The motion also "reaffirm(ed) the Board's support for the Charter Schools Act, including its provisions for all-charter districts whose applications are consistent with the Act and its intent."

### **\*\*\* High School Exit Exam: Progress in Developing Test\*\*\***

The latest independent evaluation of the California High School Exit Exam has found that "noteworthy" and "good" progress has been made in the development of the test overall and in the state's efforts to provide students with the opportunity to learn the material on the exam. Results of the "Preliminary Year 2 Evaluation Report" presented to the SBE found "no significant problems" with the first run of the exit exam, which was given this past spring on a voluntary basis to approximately 80 percent of the freshmen enrolled in California high schools. Starting with the high school class of 2004, California students must pass the exit exam -- in addition to meeting other criteria -- to get a high school diploma. An executive summary of the report by the Human Resources Research Organization (HumRRO), the Alexandria, Va.-based independent evaluator, said that school staffs were well prepared to conduct the test and generally provided "good test conditions."

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### \*\*\* High School Exit Exam, cont.\*\*\*

In addition, the process used to establish minimum passing scores was well-designed and well-executed. The executive summary also noted that the “most striking overall feature was how seriously the students took the test.” The report also found “good” progress had been made on providing all students with the opportunity to learn the material on the exit exam. Still, it was “too soon to tell whether there will be significant problems” in getting members of the Class of 2004 ready to pass the exit exam. Despite this concern, the report recommended that the Legislature and the SBE keep the current testing timeline for now. HumRRO did recommend that for future classes, testing should be delayed until the tenth grade. “Results from our Spring 2001 survey suggest that many of the standards are covered by courses most students do not take until the tenth grade,” the report said. The report also cited the need to continue consideration of options for students with disabilities and English-language learners.

### \*\*\*Information Items\*\*\*

**DISTRICT API** – Board members once again voiced clear support for the concept of district-level accountability, but acknowledged that the idea needs more discussion. Board President Reed Hastings noted that there is considerable reluctance to the idea by school district interest groups, but he added that some districts do in fact want a benchmark to compare their performance against that of others. Board Member Suzanne Tacheney said that the term “district-level Academic Performance Index” is causing confusion among superintendents and others. She said specific concerns have been raised about ranking districts when districts in California are so disparate. Tacheney noted that it never has been the Board’s intention to create a district “ranking” system. Hastings said a fundamental measurement in a district-level index would be the percentage of schools in a district meeting their API growth targets. Board Member Marion Joseph said the fundamental purpose of a district-level index would be to contrast overall performance with the performance of individual schools, particularly low-performing schools. “Many low-performing schools have been low-performing for years, even in relatively successful districts,” she said. Board Member Susan Hammer summarized the discussion, saying, “If we’re holding principals accountable, then superintendents should be held accountable, too.” Hastings asked that staff for the California Department of Education bring forward specific suggestions and options at the Board’s September meeting for further discussion.

**ALGEBRA I INSTRUCTION** – The Board approved a proposal of the Curriculum Development and Supplemental Materials Commission to send a joint letter (SBE President/State Superintendent of Public Instruction) to the field regarding student readiness for enrollment in Algebra I or an integrated, higher-order mathematics course. The letter is intended to give guidance on the transition to Algebra I instruction and will be sent after the State Superintendent and the SBE executive director have approved it.

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